

THE CARBONDALE MIRROR

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Chiefs do it!
Last year they said the Chiefs couldn't win in the Big 11. They did. This year they said the Chiefs couldn't again.
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People
The Carbondale MIRROR is people-oriented throughout, but Alice's Through the Looking Glass may just mention you or a friend or some people you know.
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Gene Free mans the console at WEJL in Scranton. Read what the Carbondale resident has to say about his job and about radio in story below. (WEJL photo)

Radio announcer frees those 'blues'

By NAN WATERS

His silky, soothing voice in the early morning hours is a better eye-opener than a cup of Taster's Choice.

Five mornings a week, from six to ten, he wakes you up, at 630 on the AM radio dial, with a potpourri of easy-to-listen-to music, weather reports, fun and friendliness.

He's Carbondale's WEJL morning man, with the improbable name, Gene Free, which also happens to be his own.

Most people ask "What was your name before you changed it?"

He didn't.

His stint at Lackawanna County's oldest radio station (it was formerly WQAN)

began 3½ years ago when he joined the company as part-time weekend newsmen, who also "ran the machine" for WEJL's FM rock sister station, WJZY.

Now he spins records four hours daily, plus from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays, and, in addition, the station's production director, promotion director and assistant program director. He puts in many consecutive 10- and 11-hour days.

"Listeners think you just come in and do your show and go home. It's not that way at all."

As production head, he's in charge of all commercials that go on the air. In his spare time, he free lances as a commercial announcer, peddling wares for the Globe Store, and others, and working through Rich Ross's Scranton ad agency.

And what does he do in his off-hours? Like the postman who takes a walk on his day off, he collects recordings of funny commercials, and spends a lot of time listening to other radio stations.

And what does Gene Free like to be called?

Dejay?

"I'm an announcer."

Featured in 'The Catholic Light'

Former city priest

changes with the times

Monsignor William Fleming who was once stationed at St. Rose of Lima Church in Carbondale is featured in the latest issue of "The Catholic Light," the newspaper of the Scranton Diocese.

Mgr. Fleming is now the pastor of Annunciation Church in Williamsport.

The story in the Sept. 3 issue of the newspaper addresses itself to the former city priest's continuing to "introduce fresh pastoral ideas approved by the Church and to offer leadership for those in his area."

However, according to the story penned by Monsignor Joseph M. Champin, it was not always that easy for Mgr. Fleming to change.

An example listed was when the Second Vatican Council reformed the liturgy on a massive scale.

Mgr. Fleming resisted — even reversed the changes which included moving the altar, dropping Latin, and revising the Mass.

He obeyed, though, and found that he liked the new approach and the benefits it brought to the people.

His innovativeness can be seen in the red fire truck parked near the church.

It's there because Williamsport regulations ruled out the use of a miniature train which once thrilled youngsters at the annual parish festival.

Hardly... "I guess you could say, I'm an announcer. You could put on a guy's tombstone, he was an announcer. You could go on being an announcer forever. I like to think of myself as a communicator."

Gene Free didn't always think of himself as such. There was a time when his goal was to become a Roman Catholic priest. With his brown curly hair and sincere expression, he would have looked the role in a clerical collar.

He also considered police work. But three years into his seminary training, while studying at the University of Scranton, he became interested in communications, and was graduated with a degree in that field. He's been communicating ever since.

He'd be 25 on Dec. 15, he's single (take note, girls), and lives with his parents at 140 Duane St. A native of Jersey City, N.J., he "likes to think of my family as a train. I'm the engine; there are five sisters in between, and my little brother, age 13, is the caboose."

Only one of them, a sister, has shown any interest in journalism, but they're all fascinated with radio.

Gene Free likes to think of himself as everybody's friend, whether on the street or on the air. He "relates to his listeners, and their needs." For example, he doesn't tell his WEJL audience that the weather will be partly cloudy... that it might rain. He prefers to tell them, "Better take your umbrella along."

The worst blunder he can remember making was when he gave a weather report that "There is a chance of schwaizers." "To cover up, he ad libbed. Or maybe a 20 percent chance of German shepherds."

Free loves his work, and prides the WEJL staff for its lack of back-biting and competition. "We've got great people to work with." He has nothing but praise for general manager Joe Silva, the staff and

management, and young Andy Thomas, the new "Issue Line" talk show host.

Host a talk show? Not really. It requires a lot of quick thinking and keeping informed.

He likes all kinds of music, except for polkas and country. "I guess I could take modern country," he adds, but he's no Kenny Rogers fan.

His radio idols, when he was growing up in Carbondale and hanging out at WCDL, were the late Bill Pierce (Mr. Radio), Paul MacNamara and Joe Silva.

WEJL is one of 600 ABC affiliates. Free points out, and feels his station keeps "listeners informed as to what's going on in their own backyards." He believes the station should be an anchor in the community in regard to public service.

Quoted as to what constitutes good taste in playing records with questionable lyrics, Free says WEJL strives to adhere to the rigid code of the NAB... National Association of Broadcasters.

He also admits he doesn't feel Rod Stewart's recording of "Tonight's the Night" measures up to the code.

Asked whether he felt a huge dose of healthy ego is vital to success in radio, Free replied "self-confidence, not ego, is important." He firmly believes that "TV is show biz... radio is real life."

What's down the career road for this young, interesting communicator? What does he hope is down the highway?

A job in one of the major radio markets for which, as he says, "You have to be in the right place at the right time." Or, a post in management or programming in one of the stations in the Top 50.

Who said the best things in life aren't free?

Arson fire guts Richmondale home

By PETE SMITH

Fire authorities are listing the cause of a fire which destroyed a vacant home in the Richmondale section of Fell Township early Sunday morning as "definitely arson," the Mirror learned Monday.

Firemen from Forest City, Vandling, Brownale, and Fell Township battled the early morning blaze which erupted in the home off Route 171 which, according to Fell Township Police Chief Jim Borosky, was discovered around 2:30 a.m.

"It burned to the ground," Borosky said Monday, adding that the home which has been vacant for the past two years, was totally engulfed when the first units arrived on the scene.

Fire authorities are labeling the fire arson since the house was vacant and there wasn't any power or utilities in the home.

Borosky noted that authorities were at the scene to try and determine the cause of the blaze, but that it hadn't been established as of yet.

The state police fire marshal will be called to the scene to investigate, the police chief said.

The glow from the spectacular blaze lit the early morning sky as flames ate at the wooden structure, some observers told the Mirror.

Forest City firefighters received the call first, Borosky noted, and then firefighters

from Gratten Singer Hose Co., Simpson, and Vandling Hose Company were summoned, as were firemen from Brownale.

Ownership of the home is uncertain, Borosky said, but added that the last known owner of the home was Mary Dresh of Richmondale. The Mirror also learned there was no insurance on the structure.

Firemen were on the scene for three hours with the last unit leaving around 5:30 a.m.

No injuries were suffered by firefighters while fighting the blaze. Further information on the blaze was unavailable at press time since Fell Township Fire Chief Andrew Graystock was out of town.

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